

## Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

### Dr. Tom Cully, Dairy Herd Veterinarian

**Editor's Note:** Tom Cully received his DVM from Cornell University on Memorial Day weekend. He and his classmate, Julie Adamchick, whose story appeared on May 23<sup>rd</sup>,<sup>1</sup> are two of a handful of Cornell graduates who begin their careers as production animal veterinarians working in the dairy industry. Both will be in the Midwest, with Dr. Cully in Wisconsin and Dr. Adamchick in Michigan. A previous posting on May 5<sup>th</sup> described the experiences of food animal-oriented graduates from Iowa State and Kansas State Universities.<sup>2</sup>

Donald F. Smith

By Dr. Donald F. Smith, based upon written and verbal communication with Dr. Cully.

June 2, 2014

Dr. Cully became interested in a career in veterinary medicine while he was in high school. Though he grew up on a crop farm in Ohio, he felt becoming a veterinarian would balance his love of animals with his interest in agriculture and science. Originally, his goal was to become a general practitioner and treat all species; however, after spending time with several mixed animal practitioners, he discovered that dairy practice most appealed to him.

*After working with a predominately dairy practice one summer during undergraduate college, I was hooked and have not looked back. I was particularly interested in the combination of individual cow care mixed with production medicine and herd health.<sup>3</sup>*

During the past decade or so, several veterinary colleges have allocated additional resources to expand their production animal base in education and clinical resources. Cornell is among those colleges.

For students like Tom, this educational framework

*served as the foundation and springboard of my veterinary career. The students, staff, faculty, and administrators of this College have offered me an excellent education of which I have only begun to reap the benefits. I was involved with student clubs which hosted multiple labs, trips, and speakers. I also participated in several externships, conferences, and visits to practices and farms. The time I spent with practitioners is what I found most helpful to developing my skills and establishing a network of colleagues. However, my classmates also played an important role in my development. They provided a lot of support,*

*encouragement, and friendly competition that were quite valuable personally and professionally.*



*Dr. Tom Cully, with his wife, Olivia, and baby Ruth, 2014*  
(Photo provided by Dr. Cully, 2014)

In addition to jobs posted this year on the website of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners, there were numerous jobs not posted publicly. As was also the case for some food animal-oriented students at Iowa State University,<sup>4</sup> Dr. Cully sought out employers with whom he would be interested in working regardless of whether he thought they were hiring or not. “Many practices keep their eyes open for the right candidate rather than post a public job listing,” he said. Dr. Cully agrees with classmate, Dr. Julie Adamchick, who learned during her search for a job that production animal medicine practices are often looking for personal characteristics such as attitude, personality, and work ethic in a new graduate as well as, of course, some basic clinical skills.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, Dr. Cully put a high priority on the personal qualities of his future employers and colleagues. He also took into consideration the type of work, location and benefits of the job being offered. “But my top priority was to find good colleagues, followed by type of work, and finally location. My family and I ranked all of these criteria for each place we visited.”

Cully notes the growing trend in the production animal industry for veterinarians to work for a single dairy, or a small number of farms, due to the increasing farm size and industry consolidation. He observed that many veterinarians already own or manage large dairies such

as the 7,000-cow farm in Wisconsin where he will be working. He will be the second associate employed, working for the two veterinarians who jointly own the dairy.

*Something that appealed to me was the opportunity to become involved in management and farm-wide decision-making at an early stage in my career. There are many ways to be a part of production agriculture and the dairy industry. I believe that being employed by a large farm can be a rewarding and important step in the career of a dairy veterinarian.*

Salaries negotiated for new graduates are a frequent topic these days. Dr. Cully's perception of compensation packages for those doing exclusively or predominantly bovine work is that they are similar to the trends of recent years, being slightly more attractive than packages negotiated by their equine- or small animal-oriented counterparts. Regardless of the specifics of salary, Dr. Cully is optimistic for the future, feeling that the role of veterinary medicine will change and evolve as the demands of farms and farmers change. "We are adaptable, with an education and skill set that enable us to stay involved with food production on many levels."

Unless they are pursuing careers in academia, it seems that relatively few graduating veterinarians with production animal interest pursue formal internships. It could be that they feel more prepared for jobs right out of college, or perhaps they feel they get good support and mentoring in their first employment experiences. Regardless, it certainly is different from graduates going into the established equine field where internships are the norm, and it sometimes takes several years to be fully integrated into the more prestigious equine practices.

As noted above, this is the third story devoted to bovine and production animal veterinary medicine for this graduating class. It will be interesting to follow these and other food animal-oriented graduates as their careers progress.

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, Donald F. Dr. Julie Adamchick: The Making of a Production Animal Veterinarian. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, May 23, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, Donald F. Are Production Animal Jobs Improving for 2014 Veterinary Graduates? *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, May 5, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Cully, Tom, DVM (Food animal veterinary practitioner, Wisconsin). Emails to Donald F. Smith (Cornell University), May 18 and 26, 2014. The numerous quotes and the story throughout are from this correspondence and subsequent meeting on May 20, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, Donald F. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, May 23, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, Donald F. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, May 5, 2014.

#### KEYWORDS:

Tom Cully  
Production Animal Medicine  
Food Animal Medicine  
Bovine Practice

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Wisconsin  
Cornell University  
Judy Adamchick  
American Association of Bovine Practitioners

TOPIC:

Bovine Practice  
Careers in Veterinary Medicine

LEADING QUESTION:

Why are more dairy veterinarians working on a single farm or with a small number of farms?

META-SUMMARY:

Dr. Tom Cully, a 2014 veterinary graduate, anticipates working as a bovine veterinarian on a 7,000-cow dairy in Wisconsin.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Donald F. Smith, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

*Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine* is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.